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Atta,rakkhita Sutta

Or, **Attāna Rakkhita Sutta** The Discourse on the Self-protected | S 3.5/1:72 f

Theme: The best protection is self-protection

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2012

1 Introduction

1.1 The Atta,rakkhita Sutta (S 3.5) is the second of four “solitary retreat” discourses related to rajah Pasenadi in **the Kosala Saṁyutta** (S 3). This is a collection of teachings the Buddha gives to rajah Pasenadi of Kosala,¹ containing four reflections of Pasenadi which are confirmed by the Buddha.² **The (Pasenadi) Piya Sutta** (S 3.4)³ and **the Atta,rakkhita Sutta** (S 3.5) closely parallel each other, centering upon the purity of the three karmic doors (the body, speech and the mind). However, while the former deals with “self-love” (*piyo attā*), our sutta here deals with “self-protection” (*rakkhito attā*) [§2].

1.2 Rajah Pasenadi, the king of Kosala and a warrior, here uses a military figure of the four-limbed army—elephants, horses, chariots and infantry—to reflect on the nature of self-protection, here seen on an “external” (*bahira*) or worldly level and on an “internal” (*ajjhātika*) or spiritual level, that is, true personal security. Political and personal security by the use of external or physical *force* may work on a worldly level, but spiritual security, that is, an internal or mental *restraint*—that is, the practice of ten courses of wholesome actions (*kusala kamma, patha*)⁴ [§§4, 5.4-6], brings true liberation.

1.3 The theme of self-protection is also found in **the Sedaka Sutta** (S 47.19), where the Buddha tells the story of two acrobats, the master and his wise student. When the master advises his student that they each look after the other for their safety as they perform, the wise student retorts that it is better that they each watch themselves. That way, they are able to keep both of them safe.

The Buddha explains that the practice of meditation, especially the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*sati’-paṭṭhāna*), is the basis for both self-protection and other-protection. In simple terms, this means that when our mind is calm and clear, we are in the best position to help others, too. A calm and clear mind, then, benefits both self and others.

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The Discourse on the Self-protected

S 3.5

1 Originating in Sāvattihī.

Those who protect not themselves

1.2 Sitting at one side, rajah Pasenadi of Kosala said this to the Blessed One:

2 “Here, bhante, while I was alone in seclusion [solitary retreat], this thought arose in my mind:⁵

¹ **Kosala Saṁy** (S 3.1-25/1:68-102) is the 3rd chapter of book 1—**Sa,gāthā Vagga** (the chapter of discourses with verses)—and has a total of 25 suttas, all related to Pasenadi.

² See **(Pasenadi) Piya S** (S 3.4) @ SD 38.8 (2.2).

³ S 3.4/1:71 f (SD 38.8).

⁴ See **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,7-14/1:286-288), SD 5.7.

⁵ *Idha mayham, bhante, raho,gatassa paṭisallīnassa evaṃ cetaso parivittakko udapādi*. This is stock: **(Pasenadi) Piya S** (S 3.4/1:71, qu in Nett 174), on wholesome self-love, **Atta Rakkhita S** (S 3.5/1:72) on protecting oneself in the 3 doors, **Appaka S** (S 3.6/1:73) in on the danger of luxurious possessions, & **(Kalyāṇa.mitta) Appamāda S** (S 3.18/1:87), on spiritual friendship. Others who speak to the Buddha incl: Māluṅkyā,putta in **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63.3/1:427); Udāyī in **Laṭṭikikōpama S** (M 66.6/1:448); a certain monk in **Raho,gata S** (S 36.11/4:216); the

‘Who now protect themselves? Who leave themselves unprotected?’⁶

Then, bhante, it occurred to me,

3 Those who
 conduct themselves badly through the body,
 conduct themselves badly through speech,
 conduct themselves badly through the mind—

leave themselves *unprotected*.

3.2 Even though
 a company of elephants, or
 a company of cavalry, or
 a company of chariots [chariot troops], or
 a company of infantry,

may protect them,
 they still leave themselves unprotected.⁷

3.3 What is the reason for this?

Their protection is *external*, not internal. Therefore, they leave themselves *unprotected*.⁸

Those who protect themselves

4 But those who
 conduct themselves well through the body,
 conduct themselves well through speech,
 conduct themselves well through the mind—

protect themselves.

4.2 Even though no company of elephants, no company of cavalry, no company of chariots [chariot troops], no company of infantry, protect them,
 they still *do* protect themselves.

4.3 What is the reason for this?

Their protection is *internal*, not external. Therefore, they *do* protect themselves.⁹

The Buddha’s response

5 “So it is, maharajah! So it is, maharajah!”

Those who
 conduct themselves badly through the body,
 conduct themselves badly through speech,
 conduct themselves badly through the mind—

leave themselves *unprotected*.

5.2 Even though
 a company of elephants, or
 a company of cavalry, or

monk Uttiya in **Uttiya S** (S 45.30/5:22); **Sāriputta** in **Sakkacca S** (A 7.66.2/4:121), in **Pār 1** (V 3:7,21); Vaṅḡsa in (**Nigrodha,kappa**) **Vaṅḡsa S** (Sn 2.12/60,2); Dabba Malla,putta in **Culla,vagga** (V 2:74,30) & **Saṅgh 8** (V 3:158,-7), Seniya Bimbisāra in **Mahā,vagga** (V 1:101,8). By those other than the Buddha, such as the layman Soṇa Kuṭi,-kaṇṇa to Mahā Kaccāna in **Soṇa S** (U 5.6/57,7, 58,8, 58,17); the monk Soṇa to Mahā Kaccāna in **Vinaya** (V 1:195,-9). See (**Pasenadi**) **Piya S** (S 3.4) @ SD 38.8 (2).

⁶ *K’esam nu kho rakkhito attā, k’esam arakkhito attā’ti?*

⁷ *Kiñcāpi te hatthi,kāyo vā rakkheyya, assa,kāyo vā rakkheyya, ratha,kāyo vā rakkheyya, patti,kāyo vā rakkheyya; atha kho tesam arakkhito attā.*

⁸ *Bāhirā h’esā rakkhā, n’esā rakkhā ajjhattikā. Tasmā tesam arakkhito attā.*

⁹ *Ajjhattikā h’esā rakkhā, n’esā rakkhā bāhirā. Tasmā tesam rakkhito attā.*

a company of chariots [chariot troops], or
 a company of infantry,
 may protect them,
 they still leave themselves unprotected.’

5.3 What is the reason for this?

Maharajah, their protection is *external*, not internal. Therefore, they leave themselves *unprotected*.

Those who protect themselves

5.4 But, maharajah, those who
 conduct themselves well through the body,
 conduct themselves well through speech,
 conduct themselves well through the mind—
protect themselves.

5.5 Even though no company of elephants, no company of cavalry, no company of chariots [chariot troops], no company of infantry, protect them,
 they still *do* protect themselves.

5.6 What is the reason for this?

Their protection is *internal*, not external. Therefore, they *do* protect themselves.”

The verses of restraint

<p>6 <i>Kāyena saṁvaro sādhu sādhu vācāya saṁvaro manasā saṁvaro sādhu sādhu sabbattha saṁvaro sabbattha saṁvuto lajjī rakkhito ’ti pavuccatī ’ti</i></p>	<p>Good is restraint of the body,¹⁰ good is the restraint of speech, good is the restraint of the mind, restraint is everywhere good, the conscientious¹¹ are everywhere restrained— he is said to be protected.</p>	<p>S 389</p>
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¹⁰ This verse is qu at MA 3:211 = Miln 399. Very close to Dh 360: here **S 389abcd** = Dh 361abcd, but lines of read: “A monk who is everywhere restrained — | is free from all suffering” (*sabbattha saṁvuto bhikkhu | sabba,- dukkhā pamuccati*, Dh 361ef). Dh 361 = Dh:G 52 = Uv 7.11 ≠ Mvst 3:423.

¹¹ “Conscientious,” *lajjī*, “(one) feeling shame, modest, well-conducted” (D 1:4, 63, 3:15; A 1:73; A 2:208, 4:249 f; Pug 57; Pv 2.9.18 expl as one who fears evil; Miln 373; DA 1:79; pl *lajjino*, V 1:44; vb *lajjati* etc Dh 316ab; opp *alajjī*, “shameless,” often said of a monastic who breaks the precepts, V 2:86; D 3:15; Miln 227). Comy here expl it as “one who has moral shame, and one who is filled with shame, is also filled with moral fear” (*lajjīti hirimā,lajjī,- gahanena c’ettha ottappam pi gahitam eva hoti*, SA 1:349).